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Kant and The Destiny of Humanity

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> One cannot reflect on mores without taking delight in recalling the image of the simplicity of the earliest times. It is a beautiful shore, adorned by the hands of nature alone, toward which one continually turns one's eyes, and from which one regretfully feels oneself moving away. – Jean-Jacques Rousseau[1]

I have never been one to believe in fate or destiny. The concept of a predetermined existence seems not only hopelessly quixotic, but also contrary to all of the higher faculties that nature gave man so that we might exist above her other creations. These faculties include reason, free will, and a rational sense of our own being. When a man finds himself on the edge of a cliff, so that his toes are not touching the rock below his heel, he might be compelled to jump if he weren't so inclined to live by all that he might choose to achieve. So if as humans, we can tangibly live or die by our own free will at any moment, why hinder our potential in life with the conclusion that the means to our existence are beyond our control? It seems that to live by the ideals of destiny and fate accomplishes nothing more than the propagation of our own insignificance in the grand scheme of life. Yet, I cannot hold myself to be entirely above those that believe in such things – destiny and fate stem from man's inherent need for an explanation of our own erratic and transient existence; a type of reassurance that all men desire to feel, myself included. While I accept that in the mystery of life the principles behind destiny and fate will always comfort men, I do not reject the notion that their relevance to the life of an individual is counter-productive.

Perhaps it is more important to realize that our conceptualization of destiny and fate is better suited to describe some sort of ultimate destination or goal and not of the actual manner in which history unfolds itself. That is to say, keeping in mind the notion of an individual's free will and their subsequent power to control their actions, it would seem that no pre-planned course of human history is possible. Consider the above quotation from Rousseau's writings – in our reflection on the past we can't help but feel nostalgic for the natural simplicity from which man was born. This state of mind holds two distinct implications: firstly, in the feeling of nostalgia, that some kind of tangible progress has been made away from man's origins, and secondly,

that the regret with which we abandon those origins points to the unknown nature of the future. While we cannot recall this initial state of being in the traditional sense of history, we can be sure that man has only ever known one state of "perfection" – in the very beginning, when man was one with nature as no more than another animal. This is a state of "perfection" in the sense that man was once entirely content in his ignorance, as we assume all other animals to be. While it is impossible to know exactly what the future holds for humanity, it seems that we are at an intermediate point in our history – far enough gone from our initial contentment to feel lost and far enough away from our ultimate destination to be aware of our increasing separation from nature. If the means by which humanity will achieve its destiny cannot be predetermined, because of man's capacity for free will, it certainly seems reasonable that the ultimate goal of humanity could be to return to a state of "contentment"; this time not characterized ignorance but by a full use of the very higher faculties that separated humans from animals in the first place.

Kant's philosophy is special in that it provides the only context in which the principles of destiny and fate describe a goal and not the actual means by which that goal is reached. Kant does not advocate solely applying the concept of destiny to one man's life. A man's actions will always be determined as seen fit by his own reason. Instead, to Kant, destiny and fate represent an ultimate goal to be achieved by humanity as a whole. While a man will always be in possession of his own free will and be unaware of his actions widespread effect, "that [which] appears to be complicated and accidental in individuals, may yet be understood as a steady, progressive, though slow, evolution of the original predispositions of the entire species."[2] Kant sees that in the grand scheme of humanity, our own lives are too transient to warrant a predestined outcome or goal. However, as a collective unit, with each man acting according to the higher faculties given to him by nature, humanity as a whole can hope to achieve something of higher purpose. Only after thousands of human generations, when man has refined his capacity for reason to endeavors of pure thought and philosophy, might he hope to achieve a state of contentment with his use of nature's higher faculties comparable to the state of contentment from which he was born.

In order to further explore how humanity might attain such a state of being, it is important to determine exactly what constitutes the distinction between humanity and nature. In his "Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent," Kant outlines nine propositions in order to provide a characterization of man as he exists today. Developing each in the context of humanity's ultimate goal is vital. Nothing exists in nature without a purpose. This is a generally accepted truth and as such, if the ultimate goal of humanity is, after all, to achieve a state of being in which man can attain full use of his higher faculties, then the characterization of man himself is crucial to understanding that very purpose.

First, while Kant is correct in his assumption that "the phenomenal appearances of the will, i.e., human actions, are determined by general laws of nature,"[3] the inner workings of the human mind are not. Take for example my sitting here typing this sentence. Only after I, the author, have utilized my knowledge of the English language in an attempt to tangibly convey what was going on in my mind in that moment, have my thoughts come into existence and have become real to others. We must objectively decide then that thoughts solely contained within the mind, by the strictest definition, do not exist – that is to say, they are not part of reality and are not bounded by normal natural laws. Therefore, by deduction, reason, thought, and imagination are all unlimited capacities. Second, how is such a limitless instance – one that seems to transcend nature itself – validated by some purpose? As Kant puts it, "reason in a creature is the capacity to enlarge the rules and purposes of the use of his resources far beyond natural instinct."[4] In order for humanity to progress to an existence beyond that of which occurs in nature, i.e., living like animals, man must have the capacity to imagine how to produce out of nature that which does not exist naturally. If humanity is to eventually create a perfect existence, each new generation must retain the ability to keep improving upon those inventions and developments prior to its lifetime. Each subsequent development must be refined with increasing advancement over many generations, hence the seemingly limitless nature of human reason and imagination – progress towards Kant's notion of destiny occurs as a species over time, not merely as individuals acting in one lifetime.

Beyond the immense capacities of his mind, it would seem that nature has given little else to man as she has given to other animals. "Nature gave man neither the horns of the bull, nor the claws of the lion, nor the teeth of the dog, but only hands."[5] To Kant, this point is especially important as it reinforces the idea that "nature has intended that man develop everything which transcends the mechanical ordering of his animal existence."[6] As we established with the preceding two characterizations, it would seem that man's greatest natural gifts lie in his capacity for unlimited reason and his subsequent ability to extract from his thoughts the solution that he sees best fit for any given situation – namely, his free will. The important distinction here is that in neglecting to give man the same inherent tools for survival enjoyed by other creatures, nature has clearly encouraged man to become, for lack of a better description, an inventor. That is to say, nature, through the very same principles of evolution that apply to all species – survival of the fittest – man has developed the ability to compensate for his lack of "god-given" abilities with his intelligence. "The discovery of his food, of his clothing, [and] of his external security and defense… all pleasures that make life agreeable… [must be] achieved by man's own work."[7] In the most literal sense, we can look to our ancient ancestors to see how they attained the means for survival in the wild. It is safe to assume that Man's first tangible application of his higher

faculties was in the development of tools that sought to emulate or to exceed the natural abilities of his animal brothers. For example, where a wolf, with its razor sharp teeth, would see nothing more than a branch and a few sharp rocks, man saw a dagger; where a deer would instinctively run from fire, man stood nearby and saw the means by which he might someday keep himself warm and safe at night. On the other hand, we can see that man's ingenuity did not cease to exist as he reached the top of the food chain. Evidently, man has strove ever since to make life more agreeable for himself. Our progression from a modest but clever group of hunters into planet dominating thinkers is proof enough that "nature intended that man should owe all to himself, as though he should eventually struggle up from the greatest backwardness to the greatest skills, to inner perfection of mind."[8] Proof again that humanity might someday engineer a perfect state of being, in which the higher faculties of men could be grasped and utilized in full; that those who came before us might have struggled in order to provide the foundations of reason upon which we expand and improve today.

Nature, by placing in man's possession those higher faculties that have brought him thus far, produced a duality of sociability in man that fosters the continuation of humanity's advancement despite the newfound comfort in which man can live because of that same progress. Following the age of the hunter-gatherer, societies of men formed, dissolved, and clashed to ultimately evolve into the common social order of today. In the most basic sense, societies facilitate a more comfortable lifestyle for all its members. What exactly constitutes this comfort? Well, individuals in a society have the ability to specialize in particular trades because they can benefit from the skills and professions of the others. One man in a society need not be a "jack-of-all trades" in the sense that he still needs to feed himself and his family, even if he would rather spend his time gazing at the stars. Since the farmer lives just next-door, per se, any man is still able to attain basic necessities while spending his day indoors as a blacksmith or carpenter. Likewise, the farmer need not teach himself how to cast iron or build furniture, since the blacksmith and carpenter who buy his produce will do it for him. While the advent of society allows for man to explore a variety of talents unrelated to his own survival, it also gives man the opportunity to be lazy as his most basic needs become easily fulfilled and taken for granted.

When man finds himself in a position where he need not extend himself to live comfortably, he is certainly unlikely to extend himself further to live *more* comfortably. No matter how primitive a society might be in the overall scheme of history, if its members live with sufficient comfort we should expect the advancement of that society to plateau. However, as nature would have it, this does not seem to be true. So what drives man to continue the advancement of society to increase the comforts of his lifestyle? Well for one, man's capacity for reason and inventiveness certainly causes him to second

guess that which comes for granted, but Kant describes humanity's main motivator as being "the unsociable sociability" of man – perhaps our greatest blessing in disguise. Kant reasons that ultimately, all men are all intrinsically self-favoring in thought. That is to say, despite what I might experience or gain from the knowledge of my teachers and peers, I will often rationalize that I have a better way of organizing their thoughts. An individual's own way of thinking is the way that makes the most sense to him, and therefore, he prefers to put the thoughts of others into his own terms. Kant points out that due to our "want to arrange everything according to [our] own ideas,"[9] and the subsequent realization that other men have the same preference, we see the rise of competition amongst men in society. Man's quest for a higher use of reason becomes a means to achieve social standing amongst his peers – he wishes to resist the ideas of others, replace them with his own, and to show that his are better. Superficially, we can liken this desire for resistance to man's inclination to increase the comfort of his lifestyle. In a more profound sense, however, perhaps man does not wish to discredit his peers, but inherently desires to move towards a state of being where thought and ingenuity are so well refined that all men agree upon the correct organization of ideas – in other words, to find universal contentment in enlightenment, just as he once found bliss in his ignorance. It seems then, that man's unsociability provides the basis from which all men choose to expose their individual talents in hope of achieving both a standing amongst their peers and also to discern the highest organization of nature.

In order for humanity to achieve any kind of ultimate goal, man must first organize nature to the greatest extent possible. If he ever hopes to gain full use of his higher faculties, man must first account for all of his other needs in the creation of a perfect society. According to Kant, such a perfect society must possess both "freedom under external laws" and "a completely just civil constitution." That is to say, a perfect society will provide for man the tangibly unrestricted personal freedoms that allow for the full realization of his talents, but also balance those freedoms with a constitution so universally accepted that no man will feel its encroachment on free will and reason. Should this perfect society ever come to exist, it will put into equilibrium man's inherent desire to live according to his own ideas and humanity's need for a constructive coexistence of all men. In such a society, man would still be free to reason against others as he saw fit and thanks to the equal coexistence of all men, fair criticism would propel men to exceed their personal achievements prior to this process / criticism: "It is like the trees in a forest which, since each seeks to take air and sun away from the other, compel each other to seek both and thus they achieve a beautiful straight growth… those that develop their branches as they please, in freedom apart from each other, grow crooked and twisted."[10] It seems then that the faculties of humanity can amount to more than those of a single man, just as the beauty of a forest amounts to more than that of a single tree.

In a forest, it is evident that some trees do not grow as straight or as tall as others because of the unfairness with which nature provides talents to individuals. In a perfect society, inequality needs to be avoided at all costs. Each member should have equal potential – they must receive the same amount of freedoms and the same harshness of judgment under the constitution. If we cannot expect equality in nature, we should not expect men in society to foster this type of environment alone, after all men are inherently animals. No matter how good willed man might be, when living amongst other men he will fight to enjoy more comforts than his neighbors, just as the trees in a forest will compete for the most sunshine. This type of competition for comfort should not be confused with the competition amongst men for the highest use of reason. Competition amongst men on equal grounds about their ideas ultimately leads to a greater product and an advancement of society itself; inequality in the initial provisions of society causes some men to enjoy better utilization of their higher faculties than others, and causes social progress to move sideways, not forwards, according to the imbalance. For example, if I don't have to pay taxes and my neighbor pays double as a result, I will likely devote my free resources and time to some other interest of mine. My neighbor, on the other hand, finds himself having to work overtime to pay his doubled taxes, as a result he has little time and resources with which he can explore his own interests – therefore he has not been given an equal opportunity to exercise his reason or free will by society. All men would rather pay no taxes than pay some, regardless of what other men are paying; therein lies the danger of the desire to live as comfortably as possible. True social balance may not even exist in nature, and as such for humanity to artificially foster equal provision of resources for all men is a task not easily accomplished.

Kant addresses the problem of man's "egoistic animal inclinations"[11] in his perfect society by suggesting that all groups of men need a master in order to see tangible forward progress. While this solution is simple enough, "a master… can break man's will and compel him to obey a general will under which every man could be free,"[12] the real question arises when it comes time to appoint a master in a society. Obviously, this master must be a man himself, which is reason enough to doubt Kant's solution. If a perfect society of men should hold the ideals of equal opportunity above all else, how is it just for one man to rule over all other men? If the original purpose of a master is to ensure that no man is given comforts beyond those given to his neighbor, then how can we be sure that he who wishes to be master does not merely wish to be given more than his peers? Quite frankly, we can be sure of nothing here – the concept of employing a master above other men in order to maintain absolute equality of freedom is a paradox. If men cannot coexist without a master, then who's to say a master who is also a man does not need a master of his own? However, as Kant points out, it would seem that there is no other solution. While "one cannot see how man, try as he will, could secure

a master maintaining public justice who would be himself just,"[13] Kant sees that "nature has imposed upon [man] the task of approximating this idea."[14] That is to say, it seems as if there is no other way to ensure that the majority of humanity have equal freedoms other than by inadvertently discrediting the notion of equality itself by appointing society a master. While Kant's notion of a master is an already established means by which to police the egoistic tendencies of men in society, it remains an approximation of what humanity might eventually implement.

I find it somewhat peculiar that Kant chooses to characterize man as needing a master in his perfect society. For one, it seems ill-formed as far as the rest of his characterizations go – while an unequal society of men might need a master, the kind of goal for humanity that Kant builds towards (a society in which man need not bother himself beyond the exercise of his higher faculties) seems without the need for one. Perhaps the distinction between a primitive society in which humanity can hope to make progress towards its ultimate ends, and the ends itself, lies partially in the primitive society's need for some remaining ties to the discord of nature – a master would certainly constitute such a tie, as it would certainly make an intermediate society unequal. If a return to a state of contentment is our measurement of humanity's final destination, then perhaps when a society of men finds itself content enough in being able to fully embrace universal equality and to uphold that equality by the mutual respect for the individual freedoms of others can we imagine that humanity might have achieved its ultimate goal. There is also, of course, the distinct possibility that because man is bound by the laws of nature (save his mind), that no such instance of a universal concord in nature is feasible. It is important to note, however, that in the eventual surrender of his need for a master – when man can live purely according to reason, rationality, and free will – man severs his ties to the animal. We might conclude that, if man can someday live purely in accordance with his higher faculties and not by his primal needs, then he will no longer be animal. If man is no longer animal, then he escapes the bounds of natural laws; if he is outside of natural laws, man exists only to fully devote himself to his higher faculties. Only then might he re-enter a state of contentment with his existence comparable to that ignorance from which he was born.

The establishment of a perfectly just civil constitution is pointless if it is not universal amongst all men. As radical as it seems from our current point of view that even one society might achieve total equilibrium of freedoms and restrictions someday, Kant stresses that unless all nations operate under the same constitution, little progress towards the goal of humanity will be possible. The consistent reasoning behind the existence of different societies around the world is synonymous with the "unsociable sociability" of individual men as described in the fourth characterization. Namely that in maintaining separation from one another, states enjoy unrestricted freedom

of action against each other. Just as men will resist against the ideas of other men, states too inevitably act against other states in order to put themselves at a greater advantage to achieve higher standards of living and comfort. Every nation believes that they are more correct than the next, and as such "one commonwealth must expect from the others the very same evils which oppress individual human beings and which compelled them to enter into a lawful civil state."[15]

While Kant solved the problem of man's unsociable incompatibility by having him band together under a just constitution, evidently accomplishing the same with all the nations of the world is no modest task. According to Kant, humanity currently exists in an intermediate stage where,

> Wars, [and] the excessive and never-ending preparation for wars are making the benefits of a global society increasingly apparent. While there is certainly no end to our intermediacy in sight, only after many devastations, reversals and a very general exhaustion of the states' resources, may [states] accomplish what reason could have suggested to them without so much sad experience.[16]

Kant is a strong advocate for the idea that the incompatibility between men, which arises from differences in mastery of his own higher faculties, is the motivation by which nature intends for humanity to create a perfect society, "namely; to leave the lawless state of savages and to enter into a union of nations."[17] War, therefore, is a tool of nature (as wielded by man unknowingly) that attempts to remind those societies that have become too vested in their own comfort that a society's primary concern should be to encourage a full unfolding of its member's talents. Nature discourages the association of social order with increased comfort of living as evidenced in the fourth characterization, and above all, nature seeks to motivate man beyond his own laziness so that humanity might achieve its predisposition. Kant laments that "as long as states will use all their resources for their vain and violent designs for expansion, [they] will continually hinder the slow efforts toward the inner shaping of the minds of their citizens"[18] – so it would seem that in our current state, humanity has reached somewhat of a plateau in its forward progress.

It appears that the history of humanity insofar indicates a trend towards the establishment of the formerly discussed "perfect society" and also, therefore, a return to man's content existence. Recall that our notion of a perfect society is not merely a standalone principle, but the rational situation in which man will be able to turn his full attention to attaining the full use of his higher faculties. That being said, any evidence we might find that implies our progress towards Kant's great union of nations also implicates progress towards the destiny of humanity. Unfortunately for our theory, in the present-day international community the primary motivator is money. That

is to say, many of the projects taken on by nations today are tangibly related to profit, and as such, we can assume that nations are primarily concerned with leveraging themselves primarily to attain comfort. Take for example the United States: our lifestyle is so dependent on fossil fuels that our country is (arguably) willing to wage multiple wars in the Middle East in order to keep gas prices reasonable on the home front. The logic goes something like this: lower gas prices = more consumer spending = stronger economy = increased global presence and influence over other nations. As Kant says, the nations of today's world are at such superficial odds with one another that many refused to join efforts to reduce global CO2 emissions, citing that they lacked the economic stability to cut back on industrial activity. A more likely story is that certain nations would rather let others take the economic fall in order to get ahead, despite even impending need to address global warming – something the entire world should probably take a stake in, unified or not.

Although his text was first published in 1784, Kant finds that there is some evidence for our progress, at least in yesterday's world. Due to the norm for the increasing rights and freedoms of European citizens at the time, Kant notes, "civil freedom cannot now be interfered with without the state feeling the disadvantage of such interference in all trades."[19] That is to say, those states that chose to threaten the integrity of their citizens' freedom felt indirect negative repercussions on their economy as a result of civil unrest. Inversely, those states that encouraged the rights of their citizens saw marked improvements in industrial output and increased economic stability. As a result, there was a subsequent trend in the developed world where "restrictions of personal activities [were] being increasingly lifted and general freedom [was] granted."[20] Although money remained the primary motivator for states in these instances of increasing freedom, there is certainly no denying that the citizenry of today (in the developed world at least) is freer than it used to be. We can deduce, to Kant's apparent delight, that "enlightenment is gradually developing;"[21] despite periods of seemingly no forward progress, humanity is indeed becoming more advanced as men find themselves more able to refine their personal talents under increasingly prevalent conditions of freedom.

Kant states that above all else, a philosophical attempt at qualifying those points of human history that indicate man must first produce "*a perfect civil association*" in order for humanity to fully develop its higher faculties, as given to the species by nature, is perhaps the most important step in the eventual realization of that goal. While we must recall that there is not a rationally predetermined history of humanity in the usual sense of destiny or fate, analysis of our collective past of erratic and individual actions as they so occurred according to free will and reason at the time does yield discernable trends. Looking back to our earliest days from the present state of relative enlightenment, regardless of how insignificant that state may be in the grand scheme of progress, "a regular procession of improvements in

constitutional government"[22] becomes apparent. Insofar, those improvements have been predominantly characterized by man's development from an unsociable wanderer, who found himself primarily concerned with the comfort with which he experienced his own transient existence, into a socially interdependent beholder of nature's highest cognitive faculties, fully aware of his own role in the greater context of humanity. From these apparent changes in disposition, Kant realizes that, "one may discover a guide to explain the chaotic play of human affairs… to the art of political soothsaying regarding future changes in the state."[23] That is to say, any qualification of our history "open[s] up a consoling vision… in which the human species is represented in the distant future as working itself up to the full development of all the germs that nature has laid in it,"[24] namely the complete utilization of humanity's higher capacities for reason, free will, and a rational sense of its own existence. It is from these observable patterns of change throughout our history that our supposed destiny (in the sense that there is some ultimate goal for humanity's presence) becomes most evident.

If we hold it to be a self-fulfilling truth that all things in nature ultimately return to the state from which they originated (likened to the manner in which all life eventually becomes the sustenance by which it once survived), then it seems logical to conclude at this point that man might also find himself to be largely irrelevant in the grand scheme of things.

Yet, Kant's *Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent* enlightens us to a number of man's peculiarities amongst the rest of nature so as to suggest a different kind of destiny. First, that beyond all else, man is the only rational being in existence. He alone is in possession of that which transcends the very laws of nature, namely that he is aware of his own thoughts. In his capacity to exert free will upon his own powers of reason, man can choose to bring into existence what he sees as most relevant and important to improving the comfort of his own life. In the use of his reason to create from nature that which does not already exist, as both new ideas and as inventions, man bestows upon his future brothers (perhaps inadvertently) the ability to immortalize his existence by further refining his use of that reason. As such, the human species is unique in that one man's being transcends his own temporal presence in the natural world, and can thus contribute to the perpetual advancement of humanity as a whole. Second, that in place of evolving with specialized natural attributes to increase his own chance of survival, man was given the highest mental faculties so that he might instead become aware of the insignificance of his own survival. That is to say, while man's intelligence provided him with the ability to compensate for his lack of claws or physical agility, it also allowed for him to discern a kind of higher purpose in his individual existence as it might apply to the existence of his whole species. Third, that man's animalistic instinct to live as comfortably as possible did not hinder the continued development of his higher faculties. When man's intelligence invented society

so that he could live comfortably through cooperation with his brothers (without exerting himself to survive), his inherent desire to rearrange the reason of others according to his own interpretation of those ideas ensured that the advancement of humanity's higher faculties did not cease as survival became granted to all men. Fourth, that man became aware, in his creation of society, that the eventual continuity of the development of his higher faculties was dependent on his ability to perfect society first. Man reasoned that the increased ease of living with which society could provide him served only to increase his ability to focus on the utilization of his higher faculties, and not to increase his ability to live lazily. Fifth, that man understood that eventually all men would need to live in equal accordance to those higher faculties in order to abandon the animalistic pretense by which he was initially bounded. Only upon his transcending the animal within, might humanity hope to advance further. Sixth, that man became aware of the importance of the interconnectedness of the whole species. If all men lived under the same restrictions of one society, then all men could coexist equally, and as a result – the higher faculties of all men could exist more purely and collectively for humanity. Seventh, that man eventually became aware of humanity's progress towards some kind of ultimate goal through his own investigation of human history. That is to say, he found himself lucid to his own individual role in the grand scheme of nature, and as such he became more confident than ever before in his own development of humanity's higher faculties. Finally, Kant noted, as I am now, that it might be possible to discern nature's ultimate goal for humanity through a philosophical analysis of his past. All in all, it would seem then that the history of humanity illustrates a trend towards the isolation of reason and free will, and perhaps even all of man's higher mental faculties, from the bounds of the natural world.

At this point it would behoove us to reexamine the aforementioned self-fulfilling prophecy of nature. While it may always be the case that man himself will return to animalistic insignificance in death, perhaps the destiny of humanity need not be so grim. Kant, in his analysis of our history, makes it clear that the higher faculties possessed by humanity as a whole seem to transcend the mortal existence of any one man. If humanity eventually does create a perfect society in which no animal distractions, natural or social, avert man's attention from the full use of his higher faculties, then the possibilities for humanity become just as limitless as the human mind. If man, in realizing this fact, can foster for himself a life purely devoted to the development of his own faculties as he understands their relevance in the grand scheme of things, then I would argue he might find himself perfectly content with his transient time on earth. Only then, when in lucid, uninterrupted thought might man achieve the same sense of contentment from which he was born; only now, he is content not in his ignorance, but in the realization of his relevance to the higher purpose of humanity – to transcend nature with reason.

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ENDNOTES

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